

Empirical translation studies in a monolingual world: theoretical and methodological challenges

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From all the content available on the internet today¹ 52.7% is written in English, a 1.3% rise compared to the same time last year. Although there are 'only' 360 million native English speakers, around half a billion people speak English as a second language² and approximately 2 billion³ learners of English use it as a second or foreign language, so saying that English has become the world's lingua franca is most probably uncontroversial. English is everywhere and English texts are easily available. This wide availability inevitably also has an impact on research domains that *investigate* language one way or the other, not in the last place Translation Studies (TS). Many (the largest part) of empirical work in TS, most notably in the field of corpus-based and process-based research, has English as at least one component (be it either the source or the target language of the study). A quick glance at the corpora that are being used nowadays already reveals a gigantic bias towards English (cf. the Translational English Corpus (Baker 2004), the English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus (Johansson 1998), the Dutch Parallel Corpus (Macken et al. 2011), the CROCO corpus (Hansen-Schirra et al. 2012), the European Parliament Translation and Interpreting Corpus (Bernardini et al. 2016), and many other corpora available at the CLARIN infrastructure⁴). Although the dominance of English undoubtedly affects all areas of Translation Studies, the empirical branches are probably affected most given its dependence on large amounts of data. Abundant data availability is most often considered a boon for researchers and a comparative study involving English will most easily trace the way towards such availability. In addition, it will increase the likelihood that your research will get published since results about the English language will be deemed more relevant to a larger audience than results that do not include English.

This hegemony of English raises fundamental issues about the nature and relevance of research questions and theoretical concepts, the stability of research findings and the appropriateness of methodologies that are primarily tailored towards the investigation of the English language. To name but a few: How problematic is the status of English as a lingua franca in the world for TS? What is the impact of this given on the identification of native vs non-native speakers (as translators, text writers...) in translation corpora? How problematic is this for the identification of translations per se? Is it still relevant to distinguish translations from non-translations or should we come up with a more gradient distinction? To what extent do translations produced by native speakers of the target language differ from translations by non-native speakers of the target language? (How) can all these different writer profiles be taken into account by researchers? Do we need to take into account other translation properties, next to normalization, shining-through, explicitation, when studying other language pairs? Do we need other methodologies and/or other theoretical concepts in order to deal with less studied languages? We would like to welcome papers that, through methodological or data-related choices, try to formulate answers to the above questions.

Essential bibliography

¹ https://w3techs.com/technologies/history_overview/content_language

² <https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/the-10-most-spoken-languages-in-the-world>

³ <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-many-people-learn-english-globally-1210367>

⁴ <https://www.clarin.eu/resource-families/parallel-corpora>

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